3

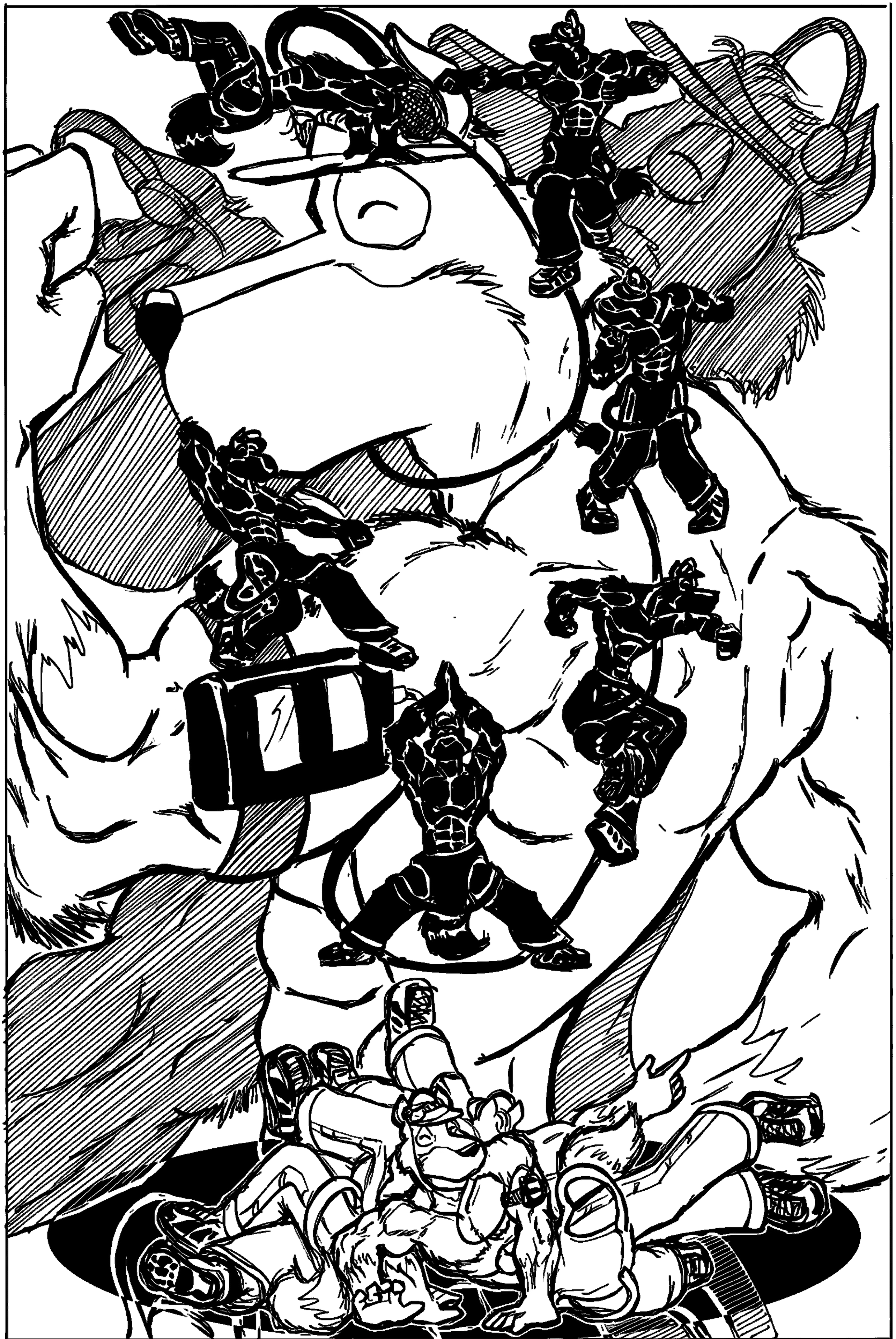
I.S.O. CHAPTER 5

ART & STORY BY VINCE SUZUKAWA



I.S.O. NUMBER 3, JANUARY 2007, COPYRIGHT © VINCE SUZUKAWA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
THE STORIES, CHARACTERS, AND INCIDENTS MENTIONED IN THIS PUBLICATION ARE ENTIRELY FICTIONAL
PORTIONS OF THIS BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED FOR PURPOSES OF REVIEW OR ADVERTISEMENT





DAMN. THAT WAS AMAZING, JAKE!

WHY, THANK YA, MAITE.

EVER THINK ABOUT DOING THAT PROFESSIONALLY? YOU'RE CERTAINLY GOOD ENOUGH.

TRYIN' TO GET ME OUTTA YER HAIR, EH?

NO. NO. JUST... MAKING CONVERSATION, BELIEVE IT OR NOT.

WELL, THE TRUTH IS, AI *DID* TRY AT ONE POINT...

UM... HE'S CUTE, BUT...A BIT... *TALL*...

CAN YE MAAKE 'IM PUT A SHIRT ON, PLEASE?

- - - - -

AI JUST DIDN'T LOOK THE PART, ONE WAY OR ANOTHAH. THE ONLY GIGS AI GOT ACCEPTED IN PUT ME IN THE BACK ROW CUZ OF MAI HEIGHT, AND...AI COULD'VE STUCK WITH THAUT, BUT THE OL' EGO THOUGHT AI DESERVED BETTAH.

THAT SUCKS. SORRY TO HEAR IT.

EH, AI ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES, MAITE.. BUT THANKS. THERE WERE OTHAH OPTIONS.

Y'KNOW, MAYBE JEFF WAS RIGHT ABOUT JAKE. IF YOU DON'T CARE THAT THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS YOU'LL CHASE ANYTHING WITH A PULSE, I SUPPOSE NOT MUCH ELSE WOULD BOTHER YOU, EITHER. MUST BE NICE.

SO...THAT'S WHEN YOU THOUGHT ABOUT CHOREOGRAPHY?

'XACTLY!

FOAH A SPLIT SEC AI THOUGHT OI! AI'M HAWT, AI CAN MAKE A BANK AS AN EXOTIC DANCAH OR SOMESUCH... THEN AI REALAIZED AI'D STILL LIKE TO *'AVE* A JOB IN TWENTY YEARS!

SURE, HIP-HOP IS A LOTTA FUN, BUT AI KNEW AI'D 'AVE TO LEARN MOAH THAN THAT.

AND SO...THAT'S WOT AI'M DOINB! AND IT'S BEEN FUN TOO. NAUT AS GLAMOROUS, BUT WOT CAN YA DO?

GO FIGURE. HE ACTUALLY HAS SOME SENSE AFTER ALL? MAYBE THERE IS MORE TO HIM THAN JUST HIS HORMONES.

PLUS...THE VIEW CAN BE A LOT BETTAH, IF YA GET MAI DRIFT.

OR...MAYBE NOT.

SO, WOT ABOUT YOU, MAITE?

'AVE YOU EVAH TRAIED DANCINB?

ER...WHAT *ABOUT* ME?

HECK NO.

WHY NAUT? YA DO THOSE MARTIAL ARTS, AI KNOW YOU MUST BE COORDINAITED ENOUGH FOAH IT.

I'M JUST NOT INTERESTED.

OH, AI KNOW... YER ONE OF THOSE BLOKES 'OO'S WORRIED 'E'LL LOOK "GIRLY" IF 'E TRIES, RAIGHT?

ER...WHAT IF I AM?

THAT JUST MEANS YER NAUT DOIN' IT RAIGHT! 'ERE, AI'LL SHOW YOU HOW!

REALLY, IT'S OKAY, I DON'T--

JUST REMEMBAH THE MOST IMPOAHTANT THING IS THE HIPS.

IT'S ONLY WHEN YA SWING YER HIPS AROUND LAIKE A BELLEH DANCAH THAT YA LOOK LAIKE A SHEILA.

KEEP YER HIPS FAIRLY STEADY AND CONCENTRATE MOAH ON YER SHOULDAHS.

SEE?

HI

HI

GUH, HANG ON A SEC, JAKE, I, UH, GOTTA TAKE THIS CALL

BORIS! NO, I DIDN'T FORGET, WE'RE GOING TO MAKI DADDY FOR LUNCH, RIGHT?

GREAT, I'M ON MY WAY NOW. SEEYA THERE!

AND I'M AFRAID WE MADE RESERVATIONS FOR ONLY TWO...

LATER!

S'ALRIG--

SLAM

Y'KNOW, AI'M STARTIN' TO THINK THAT TAIGAH IS A MAITE SKITTISH ABOUT SOMETHING... NAUT SURE WOT...

WELL, THAT'S COOL. I WISH MY T.A. WAS MORE LIKE THAT.

MY WEEK? OH, SORTA...STRESSFUL, ACTUALLY.

SEE, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO ASK SOMEONE OUT, BUT...AHEH, THE TRUTH IS, I'VE NEVER ASKED ANYONE OUT BEFORE.

NO, REALLY, I SWEAR. I JUST...NEVER HAD TO...

JESSIE CALLED AGAIN. I THINK SHE'S... INTERESTED.

I KNOW, BUT I'VE GOT PRACTICE THIS WEEK; BIG GAME COMIN' UP.

THAT'S RIGHT, BUD, I SCORED US A DOUBLE DATE WITH *THE* TWINS FRIDAY. YOU CAN THANK ME SATURDAY.

HOMECOMING OCT 13 DANCE GO WYVERNS

HI, CODY! TEE-HEE!

SO... YEAH.

I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS HOW TO STEER A CONVERSATION IN THAT DIRECTION, DO YOU?

HEH, DIDN'T THINK SO...

Y'KNOW, BORIS IS ACTUALLY A PRETTY COOL GUY...

IT'S FUN HANGING OUT WITH HIM. AND HE'S A GREAT LISTENER. HEH, TOO BAD HE'S STRAIGHT!

IT'S NICE HAVING SOMEONE ELSE TO SPILL MY GUTS TO BESIDES--

GWUH!

HEY THERE!

OH, I KNOW WHY YOU'RE HERE.

I JUST--

YOU JUST CAME LOOKING FOR ME CUZ I'M AVOIDING YOU...

I'M SORRY, BUT I'VE FELT GUILTY.

YOU WENT OUT OF YOUR WAY TO OFFER ALL THAT ADVICE, AND I DIDN'T WANT TO SEEM UNGRATEFUL CUZ I HAVEN'T USED IT YET.

BUT I'VE BEEN WORKING ON IT, I REALLY HAVE.

ER, ACTUALLY I'M HERE CUZ JAKE CALLED ABOUT A BROKEN DOOR.

AH.

BUT... SINCE YOU BROUGHT IT UP...

D'OH!

HAVEN'T ASKED YET, THEN?

C'MON, I KNOW IT'S CLICHED, BUT...WHAT'S THE WORST HE CAN SAY?

STILL BEIN' A COWARD, YEAH.

OH, SORRY, I'M BUSY THAT DAY. I NEED TO, UH...WASH MY HAIR.

ACTUALLY, I PREFER BLONDS. AND WOLVES. SAY, I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU COULD HOOK ME UP WITH YOUR ROOMIE, COULD YOU?

HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH

CODY, WE GOTTA GET YOU A LESS ACTIVE IMAGINATION...

MMM.

THIS IS GETTING RIDICULOUS.

HOW MUCH LONGER CAN I KEEP STALLING?

ALL RIGHT. TONIGHT, THEN!

I'LL JUST WAIT FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT, AND--

CRASH

HUH?

HAVE A NICE DAY

MY APOLOGIES. IF I'D HAVE KNOWN IT'D BE THAT EASY, I WOULDN'T HAVE PUSHED SO HARD.

DID...THOR JUST WIN THE PUSHOVER?

WOW. I DIDN'T THINK HE WAS DOUG'S TYPE.

I DON'T THINK DOUG *LET* HIM WIN...

OH. WELL, A SPILL IS A SPILL...

SOMETHING TELLS ME THE RIGHT MOMENT ISN'T GONNA HAPPEN TONIGHT...

THE NEXT DAY...

OKAY, WELL, NO THOR TONIGHT. SAM'S IN A GOOD MOOD, DOUG'S LOOKING HOT, JAKE'S NOT HERE...

SO LET'S SEE IF I CAN PULL IT OFF THIS TIME...

BRIAN JOSEPH BURNSIDE
11607 WYLER AVE
BAY VIEW, CA 93416

SEX:M HAIR:BRN
HT:6-01 WT:205

!

TODD?

UM...ACTUALLY, GUYS, I'VE HEARD THIS BAR IS KINDA...*EXPENSIVE.*

I'M SORTA LOW ON FUNDS RIGHT NOW. D'YOU MIND IF WE TRY HITTING A DIFFERENT ONE?

WASHIN' WERE

EXPENSIVE, MY ASS.

THE FOOLS PROBABLY MEANT OUR BARMAIDS ARE SO HOT, THEY LOST TRACK OF HOW MUCH THEY WERE TIPPING.

WELL, ARE YOU WAITING FOR AN ENGRAVED INVITATION? G'WAN.

HEY, I JUST WANTED TO SAY THANKS. DOES THIS MEAN WE'RE--?

I CAN'T REALLY TALK RIGHT NOW; I'M ON DUTY...

OKAY, FAIR ENOUGH. I'LL JUST ASSUME THIS IS A GOOD SIGN; LET ME KNOW WHEN YOU'RE READY.

AND I WAS A NERVOUS WRECK ALL NIGHT, WORRYING THAT HE AND HIS BUDS WOULD GET CAUGHT. SO, ONCE MORE, I MADE ZERO PROGRESS WITH DOUG...

EH, I MUST SOUND LIKE I'M JUST MAKING UP EXCUSES AT THIS POINT.

I WOULDN'T CALL IT THAT. I KNOW THIS IS A BIG FIRST STEP, AND YOU HAVE EVERY RIGHT TO BE NERVOUS. BUT KEEP AT IT! I KNOW YOU'LL GET IT EVENTUALLY.

REALLY?

YEAH, I HAVE FAITH IN YOU.

AND/OR A BACKUP PLAN.

HANGOUT

NICE HAT...

OI?

G'DAY, JEFF...Y'ALRAIGHT THERE?

EH? OH, HI, JAKE.

I WAS JUST TRYING TO GET A BIRTHDAY GIFT FOR A CLOSE FRIEND, BUT IT DIDN'T WORK OUT.

WOT WAS IT?

WELL, HE'S A BIG FAN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BASILISKS,..

ONE OF THE THINGS HE'S MISSING FROM HIS COLLECTION IS A RARE RED BASEBALL CAP THEY DISCONTINUED A FEW YEARS BACK. PRICEY.

AH...

BUT IT WAS NAICE OF YA TO TRY.

FUNNEH, AI THOUGHT Y'COULD GET ANYTHIN' ONLAINE NOW...

YEAH, HOW 'BOUT E-BAY?

OH, I WAS DOING THAT.

I GOT ONE BY SHEER LUCK, BUT I FOUND OUT TODAY THE VENDOR FLAKED.

THAT SUCKS.

BUT I'LL BE OKAY, I'LL JUST HAVE TO THINK OF SOMETHING ELSE BEFORE TOMORROW. THANKS FOR LISTENING.

GOOD LUCK! LET ME KNOW IF THERE'S ANYTHING AI CAN DO.

DITTO.

THANKS, GUYS.

THEY BOUGHT IT.

CALLIN' IT A NIGHT?

YUP.

EXCELLENT SERVICE AS ALWAYS. AND THANK *YOU* FOR LISTENING TOO.

WHOA! THANKS!

. . .

CLICK

WHIRR

HUH?

SPLOOSH

OI!

HEH, SORRY ABOUT THAT, I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED. DID I GET ANY ON YOU?

NOPE, S'COOL, MAITE.

CRAIKEY! THERE'S A BASILISK ON 'IS HAT. AND IT'S RED!

'S'THAT THE HAT JEFF WANTED? WHY DIDN'T TY OR JEFF GET IT EARLIAH?

HM, UNLESS THEY'RE TOO SHORT T'SEE IT? MEBBE... COME TO THINK OF IT, **AI'VE** NEVAH SEEN 'IS HAT BEFORE NOW...

WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE?

UH-OH! JEFF'S GONE!

HM, IF AI WORK FAST, AI CAN STILL CATCH UP WITH JEFF TONAIGHT...

AI'VE GOT A LITTLE PROPOSITION FOR YA, MAITE.

PROPOSITION?

YUP! COME WITH ME...

SURE...

HEY!

WAIT, I'M THE ONLY ONE YOU CAN GET IT FROM?

WOULDN'T BLAME YA IF YA DON'T BELIEVE ME, BUT YEP!

WELL, IN THAT CASE... ALRIGHT.

ACE! YOU'LL BE MAKIN' SOMEONE VERY HAPPEH!

THANKS, MAITE! AI'LL MAKE IT UP TO YA LATAH, AI PROMISE!

'KAY.

?

HEY, DOUG. WHAT'S UP?

HEH, I'M NOT ENTIRELY SURE...

ALL I KNOW IS JAKE SURE CAN BE PERSUASIVE.

"PERSUASIVE?"

+

+

=

CODY? SOMETHING WRONG?

NO... JEFF WAS RIGHT...

...YOU DON'T WANT TO LOOK BACK ON THIS AS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY...

...SOMEONE'LL STEP IN AND NAB HIM IF YOU STALL TOO LONG...

DAMMIT, IT BLEW IT. DAMMIT!

BUT...I GOTTA CHANGE THE SUBJECT. HE DOESN'T KNOW ABOUT ME, SO THERE'S NO POINT OPENING UP THAT CAN OF WORMS NOW. I CAN BEAT MYSELF UP LATER...

WRONG?

OF COURSE SOMETHING'S WRONG! I MEAN, JAKE?!

WHY JAKE?

DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MANY DISEASES HE MUST BE CARRYING AROUND?

JAKE?

DISEASES...?

WAIT, YOU DIDN'T THINK...BECAUSE OF THE SPILL...? C'MON, *JAKE?* MR. PROMISCUOUS?? OH, I GET IT, IT'S A JOKE, RIGHT? HEH-HEH!

SO NOW IT'S "JAKE AND DOUG, SITTIN' IN A TREE, K-I-S-S-I-N-G?"

HA, GOTCHA! GOOD ONE, WASN'T IT?

HEH-HEH, WHOOSH. WELL, I ALWAYS DO LIKE A MAN WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR.

WA-HA, YEAH, ME TOO.

AHEH...

IT, UM, SOUNDS LIKE WE'VE GOT SOMETHING IN COMMON THERE, DON'T WE?

SO MAYBE WE CAN... MEET UP SOMETIME AND... UH, SEE WHAT MORE WE HAVE IN COMMON?

I'D LIKE THAT.

SAY, OVER LUNCH? AND... MAYBE A MATINEE BEFORE OUR SHIFT?

SOUNDS GOOD. WHAT DAY?

ER... I HAVE CLASS TOMORROW...HOW'S THURSDAY? 11:30?

THAT'D WORK OUT PERFECTLY.

GREAT! IT'S...A DATE THEN!

ALRIGHTY!

WELL, I'D BETTER GET BACK TO WORK.

BUT I'LL BE LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

ME TOO.

I THINK IT'D BE A GOOD IDEA TO SIT DOWN FOR A SEC...

YES...

iSQ

CHAPTER 6

IMPOSITION



OF COURSE HE DID! YOU HAD YOUR TURN AT THE PUSHOVER ALREADY!

AH...IT'S A ONE-SHOT GAME, THEN?

DUH! WHY WOULD WE JUST LET SOMEONE ELBOW HIS WAY IN HERE AND EARN FREE DRINKS ANYTIME HE WANTS?

I SEE. AND YOU INDICATE THIS WHERE...?

UH...

WELL, WE DIDN'T...

IT'S JUST THAT...

NOBODY'S EVER WON MORE THAN ONCE.

THAT ISN'T MY FAULT.

YOU OKAY?

I THINK SO...

C'MON, TYRONE! DO YOU REALLY THINK HE CARES WHAT THE RULES WERE? LOOK AT HIM, NOT A TRACE OF REMORSE...

SIGH...HE'S RIGHT, SAM.

WHAT?!

WELL, MAYBE WE SHOULD'VE KNOWN TO RETHINK THE GAME AFTER LAST TIME, THEN.

ALRIGHT, THE REST OF THE NIGHT'S ON ME. BUT DON'T TRY THAT AGAIN.

FINE.

HOLD ON A SEC...

HM, COCKINESS... AGGRESSIVENESS... POOR JUDGMENT...

NO, I THINK YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH, SIR...

CODY! IT'S OKAY, DON'T--

MM...NO, HE'S RIGHT.

I HAVE THE FEELING SERVICE IS GOING TO GO STEADILY DOWNHILL FROM HERE, ANYWAY.

YOU CAN JUST TAKE MY PRIZE OFF MY TAB FOR THE NIGHT INSTEAD, AND WE'LL CALL IT EVEN. GOOD EVENING, GENTLEMEN.

WHERE THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING? IT DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY.

I BELIEVE THAT ARRANGEMENT IS MORE THAN FAIR.

IF YOU DON'T THINK SO, YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRY AND CHANGE MY MIND.

JUST REMEMBER...

...WHICH ONE OF US HAS THE LONGER REACH.

EH?

OOF!

WHAT THE--?

YEAH, WELL, A LONGER REACH DOESN'T MEAN JACK IF YOU LEAVE YOUR BACK WIDE OPEN.

DON'T YOU HAVE ANY HOBBIES BESIDES MARTIAL ARTS?

WHAT IS WITH YOU TIGERS?

HMPH. NO MATTER.

HERE.

KEEP THE CHANGE.

YOU CAN BUY YOUR STRIPEY BOYFRIEND A MEDAL WITH IT.

BOYD

CRAP, HOW DID HE FIND OUT?

HAVE I BEEN THAT OBVIOUS?!

COULD JEFF HAVE LEAKED THIS, "FOR MY OWN GOOD"? NO WAY!

SO DOES EVERYONE KNOW? EVEN JAKE?

AND IS IT GONNA GET BACK TO MY PARENTS SOMEHOW?

WHAT DO I DO?

I CAN'T DENY IT--WHAT WOULD DOUG THINK?

AND I CAN'T JUST SAY NOTHING!

GAH.

MAKE SURE MY MEDAL IS SILVER, BABY.

WITH A *RAINBOW* RIBBON!

GIMME A BREAK!

DUDE, DON'T FLATTER YOURSELF.

JUST CUZ I NOTICED YER ASS WAS OPEN, DOESN'T MEAN I WAS CHECKING IT OUT..

WAIT, I SEE HOW IT IS.

THE ONLY WAY YOU CAN GET ANY IS BY SPREADING RUMORS ABOUT THE COMPETITION, RIGHT?

VERY AMUSING.

THAT'S NOT WHAT I--

OR... IS THIS JEALOUSY?

C'MON, YOU *DO* KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO SPILL DOUG'S TRAY, DON'T YOU?

HUH?

JEALOUS? WHAT?

WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT?

HEY, WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

WHY IS EVERYONE GRINNING?

STOP THAT!

AND YOU!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU LOOKING AT???

RRRRRROH!

YOU DID IT, TODD! THANKS A MILLION, I...

TODD?

TODD?

I THINK HE TOOK OFF.

YOU HAVE... TWO...SAVED MESSAGES.

THE NEXT MORNING...

HEY.

SUP?

I ASKED MY ROOMMATE TO STAY CLEAR OF THE ROOM FOR AWHILE.

YEAH, THANKS.

WOULD YOU LIKE A DRINK?

SO...

I WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR LAST NIGHT, BUT YOU'D BAILED.

OH, UH, THAT. I THOUGHT THAT'D BE EASIER ON YOU. WE HAVEN'T EXACTLY BEEN ON SPEAKING TERMS, AND I DIDN'T KNOW IF YOU WERE STILL MAD.

ME? NO, I HAVEN'T BEEN MAD FOR A LONG TIME. I WAS JUST... STALLING.

WHY, WHAT'S WRONG?

SIGH...I DON'T FEEL LIKE I DESERVE YOUR FRIENDSHIP.

HUH??

I MEAN, AT FIRST I WAS STOKED...MY BEST FRIEND WAS COOL. WITH MY BIGGEST SECRET. BUT THINKING ABOUT IT LATER...I FELT GUILTY.

I'D BEEN LYING FOR *YEARS* JUST TO SAVE FACE... ARE YOU SURE YOU'D STILL HAVE WANTED TO BE BUDS IF I'D BEEN HONEST FROM THE START?

AW, GIVE ME A LITTLE CREDIT. I UNDERSTAND WHY YOU WERE PRETENDING, AND I JUST WANT IT BEHIND US.

AND SO WE DON'T SEE EYE TO EYE ABOUT ONE SUBJECT. SO WHAT? LIFE WASN'T JUST ABOUT GIRLS.

Love

DUDE, I WASN'T DWELLING ON ANY AWKWARDNESS... WE WERE TOO BUSY HAVING FUN!

YOU HAVE LEARNED WELL, GRASSHOPPAH.

LIKE THAT CAMPING TRIP WHERE WE FOUND OUT WHAT A PYRO I AM?

OR MS HUGHES' BIOLOGY CLASS?

OR ALL THOSE 1AM TALKS AT MELINDA'S DINER, WHERE WE--

YEAH, BUT--

UM, HANG ON, LEMME FINISH.

OH! DON'T FORGET--

SORRY...

THIS IS *WHY* THERE WERE NO AWKWARD MOMENTS.

YOU'RE SO EAGER TO PUT POSITIVE WORDS IN MY MOUTH, I NEVER HAD TO MAKE EXCUSES WHEN I WAS UNEASY. AND YOU'D COVER FOR ME AROUND EVERYONE ELSE, TOO.

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW MUCH I OWE YOU FOR THAT, AND MORE...I HAVEN'T BEEN FAIR TO YOU.

TODD CONNORS FOR ENT BODY ESIDENT

I MEAN, YOU WERE ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR AND FRIENDLY GUYS IN CLASS.

I DON'T REMEMBER WHY YOU EVEN BOTHERED ASSOCIATING WITH A GRUMP LIKE ME...

I ALWAYS FIGURED IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE YOU WERE NICE TO EVERYONE.

BUT I...WELL, I KINDA LATCHED ONTO YOU ON PURPOSE, AND I'M NOT PROUD OF MYSELF.

YEAH, IT WAS BECAUSE I LIKED YOU, BUT YOU ALSO WERE... BASICALLY THE QUINTESSENTIAL ALL-AMERICAN RED-BLOODED KID.

I FIGURED IF I FOLLOWED YOUR EXAMPLE, EVERYONE WOULD THINK I WAS ONE TOO.

SO I CLUNG TO YOU AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, WHETHER YOU LIKED IT OR NOT.

PLUS I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOU TO STEAL THE SPOTLIGHT, SO I COULD BE THE UNNOTICED SIDEKICK. ESPECIALLY AROUND GIRLS.

YOU WERE THE CUTE ONE, SO I USUALLY COULD PALM 'EM OFF ON YOU.

AND... ALRIGHT, I GOTTA ADMIT...

FOOTBALL SIGNUP

THERE WAS ALWAYS THE TINY, TINY LITTLE HOPE THAT ONE DAY YOU'D TURN OUT TO BE BI, AND WE...

HEH STUPID, I KNOW.

OH. I SEE...

...

BWAHAHAAH, AHAHAHAHAAAAAAAAAAAHAAAA, AHAH, AHAH, HOOHOOK--AHAHAHAHAHA*SNICKER*GAAAHAHAHAWHAW--

IT'S OKAY, GO AHEAD AND LAUGH.

OKAY, OKAY, IT WASN'T *THAT* FUNNY, WAS IT?

SORRY, JUST NEEDED A TENSION BREAKER. EE-HEE.

RIIIGHT.

ANYWAY, MY POINT IS I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF OUR FRIENDSHIP, AND YOU GOT THE SHORT END OF THE STICK.

WELL, YEAH.

WHAT? C'MON, DO YOU HONESTLY BELIEVE THAT?

LEMME ASK YOU SOMETHING. DO YOU STILL TALK TO DWIGHT KITTRIDGE?

HUH? NO, NOT SINCE HE DROPPED OUT.

ME NEITHER. BUT YOU KNOW WHY HE LEFT, RIGHT?

I HEARD ABOUT IT.

YEAH, WELL... I ALMOST WAS THERE THAT NIGHT, TOO.

HE WOULD'VE BEEN MY RIDE TO THE PARTY, AND I KNOW I'D HAVE GOTTEN SMASHED BY THAT POINT TOO. I BET WE WOULD'VE BEEN CELLMATES.

AND I'M SURE COACH WAS PISSED ENOUGH TO HAVE BOOTED *MY* ASS OFF THE TEAM, TOO.

AND YOU'RE THE REASON I WASN'T WITH HIM.

ME? HOW?

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU AND I HAD A BELT TEST SCHEDULED THE NEXT DAY?

I COULD'VE SAID, "SCREW IT", PARTIED 'TIL DAWN, THEN SHOWN UP HUNGOVER, AND FAILED. BUT THEN I WOULD'VE FELT LIKE I'D LET US BOTH DOWN. I WANTED US TO ADVANCE TOGETHER.

SO, I DECIDED TO STAY HOME AND GET A FULL NIGHT OF SLEEP INSTEAD... AND OF COURSE, WE PASSED. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW ABOUT THE ARREST UNTIL THE NEXT MONDAY.

I GUESS I NEVER THANKED YOU FOR THAT.

HUH. WELL, YOU'RE WELCOME... BUT IT'S NOT LIKE YOU WOULD'VE JUST QUIT SCHOOL THE WAY DWIGHT DID.

EH...I GUESS NOT. BUT DODGING A BULLET IS STILL DODGING A BULLET.

HMM... ALRIGHT, MAYBE I INDIRECTLY HELPED YOU *ONE* NIGHT, OUT OF HOW MANY YEARS YOU'VE KNOWN ME?

BUT IT WASN'T JUST ONE NIGHT.

AFTER THAT, I REALIZED HOW MUCH HANGING OUT WITH DWIGHT'S CROWD WAS KILLING MY GRADES AND MY GAME. SO I DECIDED TO CLEAN UP MY ACT-- WITH YOU AS MY EXAMPLE.

ME?! I ONLY DITCHED PARTIES TO AVOID ALL THE GIRLS.

AND I NEVER GOT DRUNK CUZ I WAS AFRAID THAT...YANNO, THE WRONG THING MIGHT SLIP OUT. I WAS AN ANTISOCIAL LOSER!

COACH

WHATEVER YOU WANNA CALL IT. YOU'D ALWAYS BEEN A GOOD EXAMPLE.

GO RAKENS

D'YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE HAVING THE BIGGEST, TOUGHEST GUY IN SCHOOL AS YOUR WORKOUT PARTNER?

I BUSTED MY ASS TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH YOU.

AND WHEN I COULDN'T OUTLIFT YOU..I PUSHED MYSELF HARDER IN OTHER AREAS.

ALL FOR THE BETTER.

STILL THINK YOU DIDN'T EARN YOUR KEEP AS A FRIEND?

WELL...

DUDE, ADMIT IT.

NO.

OH YEAH?

YEAH! C'MON, FOO'.

A'IGHT THEN, LE'Z GO!

ONE ASS-WHUPPIN', COMIN' RIGHT UP.

TIGGA, PLEASE!

HEH-HEH!

HA! MAN, I WISH WE'D GOTTEN THIS OUT OF THE WAY THE FIRST TIME AROUND.

I KNOW, WE COULD'VE STILL BEEN ROOMIES.

WELL, THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO SWITCH US NEXT SEMESTER.

WELL, UNTIL THEN...WE'VE GOT SOME CATCHING UP TO DO.

YOU BET.

IN FACT, WHAT'RE YOU UP TO NOW? WANNA HIT THE GYM?

IT'S BEEN AWHILE SINCE I HAD A SPOTTER WHO COULD KEEP UP WITH ME.

YEAH, I CAN TELL. STARTIN' TO LOOK PRETTY FLABBY THERE.

FLABBY, HUH? STILL FEEL FLABBY?

I'LL SHOW YOU-- AWRIGHT AWRIGHT, YOU WIN!

HONESTLY, I'D LOVE TO GO, BUT CAN WE TRY TOMORROW INSTEAD?

NO PROBLEM. GOT A HOT DATE?

ER... YEAH, I DO. AT 11:30.

THAT'S...IN AN HOUR...

YOU'RE SERIOUS? HEY, CONGRATULATIONS! I'M HAPPY FOR YA!

I'VE GOT A DATE IN AN HOUR.

SO WHO IS HE?

PACIFIC UNION

I'VE GOT A DATE IN AN HOUR!

UM... ACTUALLY, FIFTY-FIVE MINUTES.

I'VE GOT A DATE IN AN HOUR!!!

HOO-BOY.

"RINGTONE"

FLUFFY TIGER
810-555-1975

"RINGTONE"

HEY, CODY... 'SUP?

WAIT, WAIT, SLOW DOWN, WILL YA?

WITH DOUB?

IN AN HOUR?

WELL, THAT'S GREAT!

HEH-HEH, I KNEW YOU COULD DO IT!

NOW JUST CALM DOWN, AND REPEAT AFTER ME: "IT'S ONLY LUNCH AND A MOVIE..."

WET PAINT

TO BE CONTINUED JULY 2007

AS NOTED, I.S.O. ORIGINALLY STARTED OUT JUST A LOOSE ASSEMBLAGE OF THE VARIOUS BOYTOYS I'D CREATED POST-*CLASS MENAGERIE*. AFTER I DECIDED I ACTUALLY WANTED TO HAVE A GO AT MAKING A SERIOUS COMIC, SOME CHARACTERS NATURALLY COULDN'T BE FORCED INTO THE SETTING AS-IS, AND I DID A FEW REWRITES OVER TIME. HERE'S SOME CHARACTERS THAT WERE "LOST" DURING DEVELOPMENT.



DUNCAN "DRAKE" BRAEBURN:

THE ORIGINAL GARDENER. HE WAS PURPOSELY DESIGNED TO BE A RIP-OFF OF GROUNDSKEEPER WILLIE FROM "THE SIMPSONS"--AN ILL-TEMPERED, LOUD, ATHLETIC SCOTSMAN--AND I MADE NO ATTEMPTS TO DISGUISE THAT. BUT I DIDN'T WANT HIM IN PRINT, AND IN RETROSPECT, THOR'S QUIETLY MENACING PERSONALITY WORKS BETTER IN THE STORY THAN DRAKE'S BLUSTER. I WILL NOTE THAT THE FIRE THAT FORCED THOR INTO HIS CURRENT JOB SITUATION WAS, OF COURSE, ORIGINALLY CONCEIVED AS STARTED BY DRAKE'S BREATH.



MONTY SATTLER:

THE ORIGINAL SOUNDING BOARD FOR CODY. I KNEW FROM THE START HOW ANTI-SOCIAL CODY WAS GOING TO BE, AND THE ONLY WAY TO FACILIATE CONVERSATION ABOUT HIMSELF WOULD BE GIVING HIM A FRIEND WHO NEVER SPOKE. UNFORTUNATELY, I NEVER REALLY HAD A SOLID REASON FOR MONTY'S SILENCE WHEN HE WAS CREATED...I JUST THINK ENORMOUS BEEFY QUIET GUYS ARE FUNNY. SO HE WAS DUMPED IN FAVOR OF BORIS, WHO AT LEAST HAS THE EXCUSE OF HIS EATING HABITS FOR IMPEDING HIS SPEECH...PLUS WITH DRAKE GONE, ADDING ANOTHER REPTILE KEPT A BETTER SPECIES BALANCE.



RUSTY ANGUS:

ANOTHER TORMENTOR OF CODY IN THE DORM, ALONGSIDE JAKE AND ZACH. AS AN IRON-LUNGED, HORNY, STUPID COW BOY WITH ASPIRATIONS OF A COUNTRY MUSIC CAREER (AND HE ISN'T HALF-BAD AT IT), HE WAS YET ANOTHER FACTOR DRIVING CODY OUT OF THE DORM AND INTO THE HANGOUT. THOUGH I LIKE ANNOYING CODY AND IT WAS NECESSARY TO HAVE HIM OUTNUMBERED AT FIRST, THERE WAS BARELY ANY REASON TO HAVE TWO CLUELESS GUYS IN THE COLLEGE, LET ALONE THREE. RUSTY SEEMED THE MOST OUT OF PLACE, SO HE WAS DROPPED AND NEVER REPLACED.

REX CARRADINE/SILVIUS ARISTOTLE:

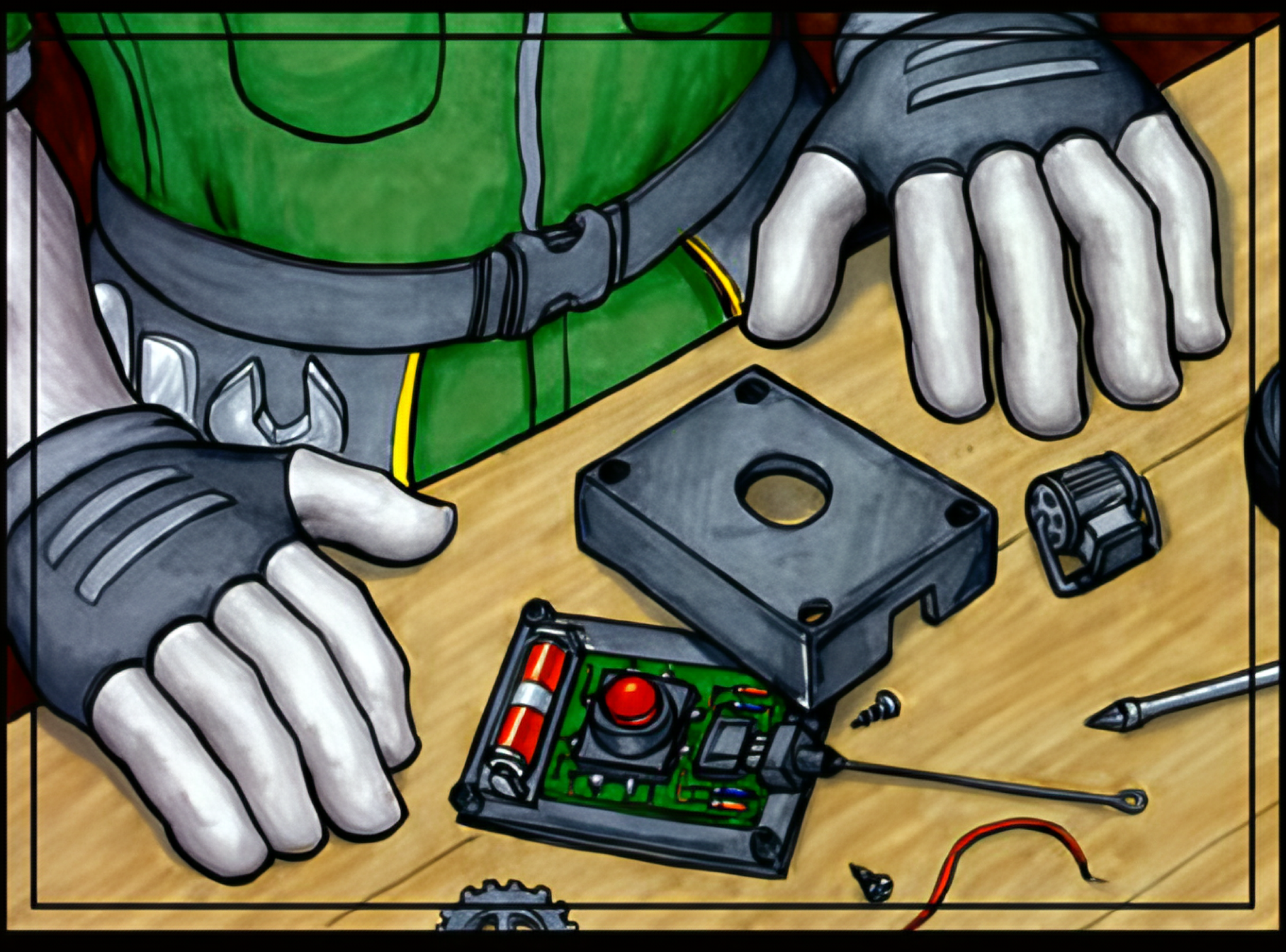
RECURRING HANGOUT CUSTOMERS, AND THE ONLY PRE-SET COUPLE. I WAS STILL IN THE MINDSET OF ANTI-LIMPWRISTED GAY STEREOTYPES, AND THESE TWO WERE ALL TIMED FOR A "GASP! YOU MEAN...YOU TWO ARE GAY TOO?!" MOMENT WITH CODY. BUT, WITH THE POINT ALREADY DRIVEN HOME AND THE CAST RATHER TOP-HEAVY, CUTTING THE DEMOLITIONS EXPERT AND FIREMAN-IN-TRAINING SEEMED TO BE A GOOD WAY TO AVOID VILLAGE PEOPLE COMPARISONS.

THE HANGOUT STAFF, TAKE 1:

THE ORIGINAL STAFF CONCEPT; ALL FELINES, INCLUDING AN ADDITIONAL DEEJAY CHARACTER THAT WAS DROPPED WHEN I MADE THE HANGOUT MORE OF A COLLEGE SPORTS BAR THAN A CLUB. THE OWNER WAS STILL AN ACROBAT AND PRIZEWINNING BARTENDER BUT WAS A PANTHER, AND THE SECOND BARMAID WAS A SIAMESE KITTY. IT SEEMED TO MAKE MORE SENSE WHY THEY HIRED CODY OUT OF NOWHERE, BUT IT ALMOST MADE THEM A LITTLE TOO CLOSE-KNIT. I PREFER A LITTLE DISTANCE IN CO-WORKER DATING.







I.S.O.: a common acronym of classified and personal ads; an abbreviation for "In Search Of."

iso-: prefix meaning equal; uniform. Thus, not different from anyone else.

i.s.o.: a comic about a repressed youth in search of a life equal to everyone else.